



COUNTY OF ALBANY
DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC WORKS

Albany County Rail Trail

Located in the Town of Bethlehem, the Town of New Scotland, the Village of Voorheesville and the City of Albany

~Public Open House – Comments and Responses~

A Public Open House was held on June 17, 2009 at the Bethlehem Town Hall. More than 120 people were in attendance. The following is a list of comments received subsequent to the meeting via comment forms, email messages and personal conversations as well as corresponding responses provided by Albany County.

1. The Albany County Rail Trail has been described as a “Multi-use Trail”. Hikers/walkers move along the trail at about 2 to 4 MPH, people on roller skates move along at up to about 10 MPH with very little stopping capability and bicyclists can travel at over 20 MPH. Baby strollers and dogs on leashes can also be expected. **How will these incompatible users be accommodated safely?**

RESPONSE:

As we did on our Menands and Cohoes sections of Mohawk Hudson Bike Path, we will install signs informing users of trail etiquette and the “Rules of the Road.” Pedestrians, bicyclists, dog walkers, baby strollers, etc. have all been accommodated safely on those sections of the Mohawk Hudson multi-use path.

2. The Bethlehem Comprehensive plan includes a trail along Route 140 (Moshier Memorial Highway) from the Albany County Rail Trail (ACRT) to the round-about at New Scotland Road. This trail could serve to connect the ACRT to the future Slingerlands Hamlet Center, Vista, the Harriman Campus and the University at Albany. Many bicyclists (commuters) use the Route 140 shoulders now to get from the residential areas south of Kenwood Ave to the New Scotland Rd. round-about. **Will serious consideration be given to making this trail connection to the ACRT in the vicinity of Route 140; or is it intended that ACRT users would somehow use the shoulders of Route 140 to make the connection?**

RESPONSE:

Like most projects our Rail Trail Project has a limited budget and cannot address all the issues and needs in the surrounding area. We received many good ideas at the public meeting and there are many good ideas in the Town Comprehensive Plan, but they cannot all be done as part of this project. We must use the available funds for building the rail trail itself because without it, these many good ideas and these many good connections will be unnecessary. As we stated in the June public meeting, trail connections and amenities will be considered when the funding becomes available.

3. **What other connections within the communities will be provided, as part of the Rail Trail project, to such places as shopping areas, schools, Library, Churches, Core Residential Zones of Delmar and Elsmere, etc.?**

RESPONSE:

We will provide maps of the areas at access points and parking lots along the trail. These maps will direct users to locations of interest such as shopping, libraries, parks, public restrooms, etc. These locations will be accessed on the existing sidewalk and road system. Users will be discouraged from using facilities which they cannot use safely.

4. **Will the County's project provide signage to guide users regarding the proper and safe use of the Trail (when to dismount bicycles, speed limits, etc.)?**

RESPONSE:

See our answer to question no. 1.

5. **Will the County's project include an emergency communication system so that users stranded on isolated portions of the Trail may call for help?**

RESPONSE:

Like the Mohawk Hudson Bike Path in Albany and Schenectady Counties, there are no plans for an emergency communication system. As you know, these systems are becoming more and more outdated because of the use and coverage of cell phones.

6. **Will night time use of the Trail be allowed?**

RESPONSE:

Like the Mohawk Hudson Bike Path, use will be restricted to day light hours between dawn and dusk.

7. **Will the trail be patrolled?**

RESPONSE:

Like the Mohawk Hudson Bike Path, we will request that local law enforcement agencies patrol the trail. The Menands and Cohoes police patrol the Mohawk Hudson Bike Path on a regular basis.

8. **Will the trail be lighted at critical locations?**

RESPONSE:

No. The trail will be restricted to daylight hours. We do not want to encourage night time use.

9. **Will toilet facilities be provided along the trail?**

RESPONSE:

No. Users will be directed to public restrooms. We are investigating ways in which we can encourage trail-related businesses to provide restrooms.

10. **Will commercial enterprises, such as bicycle repair shops and refreshment stands, be accommodated in the immediate vicinity of the trail? Will zoning ordinances be revised to make this possible?**

RESPONSE:

As you know, Albany County does not have zoning responsibility or authority. That is under local control. However, we will do whatever we can to encourage trail-related businesses near the rail trail.

11. When completed, use of the Rail Trail by bicyclists will significantly increase bicycle traffic on community roads. Bicyclists will travel from home to the Rail Trail and from the Rail Trail to many destinations such as nature preserves, shopping, schools and the Library. Many of the roads in Bethlehem are unsafe for bicycle traffic. **What will be done to make all roads safe?**

RESPONSE:

See our answer to question no. 2. We will work with local bicycling organizations to encourage safe bicycle use and bicycle safety training.

12. **Will Safe Cycling education programs be developed to inform everyone of the rights and responsibilities of cyclists and motorists on the roads and on the Trail?**

RESPONSE:

See our answer to question no. 11.

13. Great presentation tonight! We are hoping local businesses will benefit from the Rail Trail by bringing more people to the center of the Business District. Thank you for all your efforts.

RESPONSE:

See our answer to question no. 3.

14. Very supportive of future bike trail. I can't wait!

NO RESPONSE REQUIRED

15. I have used many rail trails in New York, Pennsylvania, Maryland and West Virginia. They are used by bikers, hikers, and walkers of all ages. They make a community on their own. Business benefit and the outdoors are open to all. One trail serves many as a good use of public land and money!

NO RESPONSE REQUIRED

16. All in favor. Just great!

NO RESPONSE REQUIRED

17. Ran trail for two years. Volunteers could patrol trail. I used to be an escort in Central Park and all that was needed was communication (walkie talkie then-cell phone now).

RESPONSE:

We will work with Friends of the Rail Trail (FORT) to develop and coordinate a volunteer program.

18. I believe this is a very worthwhile recreational project for Albany County to complete. I am a cyclist who started riding three years ago to improve my health. Most of my riding

is on the Mohawk Trail. However, I ride from my neighborhood near the State Office campus south along Krumkill Road to Voorheesville. I return home along New Scotland Avenue into the City of Albany. Although my ride is very enjoyable, it is also dangerous with vehicle traffic. For safety reasons, I prefer riding on designated trails. As such, I look forward to the day the Albany County Rail Trail is completed for recreational use including cross country skiing. The overall public good deserves the development of this project.

RESPONSE:

Cross country skiing will be allowed on the trail, but we will not be plowing or grooming the trail for cross country skiing activities.

19. I have been a resident of Albany County since 1987 and a homeowner here since 1988. Albany County is a great place to live, work and raise a family. I am a member of the Mohawk Hudson Land Conservancy and a member of the Rail Trail Subcommittee. The Rail Trail is a wonderful opportunity to enhance our recreational areas and open space for County residents and visitors. The Rail Trail is not just a bonus but a necessity. Healthy, safe hiking and biking opportunities are sorely needed in our area of our County.

Other communities have developed their recreational tourism identities based on their natural attributes (hiking in the Catskill Mountains, climbing in the Shawangunks). The Rail Trail may be a little less grandiose than those mountains or rockscapes but will be no less important. The historic canals and railroads provided this region with the transportation options that were previously unimaginable and drew settlers and later businesses to this area. The opportunity for safe, healthy transportation and recreation are some of the needs that the Rail Trail and its eventual connection to other trail opportunities will fulfill. I can envision a bike shop and café located at the end of the trail (Meet for a drink at the “End of the Trail Café” anyone?)

Unfortunately, I will not be able to attend the June 17, 2009 public meeting. I look forward to another chance to learn more about the Rail Trail in the future. Obviously, I am a supporter of the Rail Trail and the potential biking opportunities. You might be surprised at how big a supporter I am considering I hardly ever ride my bike! I have seen too many car-bicycle accidents and have long been frustrated by the lack of proper, safe bike lanes and pedestrian crossings nationally and locally. While I still hope for improved conditions for bicyclers and walkers along our roads, bike paths like our future Rail Trail provide another kind of roadway – a human-powered transportation corridor.

I hope that the Rail Trail design will consider the greenest design methods available to

- manage stormwater (i.e., porous paving, rain gardens and other methods to attenuate rain);
- utilize the most appropriate materials (i.e., recycled and least toxic materials); and
- consider native and non-invasive vegetation that enhances habitat options.

In closing, I would be happy to offer my help with associated water and environmental issues.

Thank you again for your efforts on the Rail Trail.

RESPONSE:

We will make every attempt to include green design methods. Stormwater management will be included in the design of this project.

20. Connect Rail Trail to Delaware Area Neighborhood, Albany and Normans Kill Farm. Background and one reason to connect: Delaware Area Neighborhood, residents advocated for bike lanes to be added during the Delaware Avenue Reconstruction (currently in progress). This did not happen due, in part, to lack of political will. Since the need to have a viable transport route from the neighborhood to downtown Albany still exists, we hope the Rail Trail can fill this need, at least in part.

Map and remove invasive species. Prevent invasive species from being brought onto Rail Trail land and from being spread from one spot on trail to other stretches. Require contractors to wash vehicles before coming on the site to prevent plants/seeds from being brought to area from off site. Map current invasive species so contractors know locations and know to take measures not to spread species from one locale to another. If fill is needed on Rail Trail require that only newly mined fill be used. Map important native plants so that they're not destroyed with land clearing work. Rail Trails are sometimes the last places native plants/our natural heritage can exist. So, while it might seem to be a low priority, if invasive species are kept from crowding out native species, the native areas can persist.

Regarding trail maintenance: If there are native species along the trail side, then mow after the plants have bloomed/gone to seed to allow them to persist (this is done on some trails in Saratoga County).

RESPONSE:

See our answer to question no. 2. We will work with the construction contractor to limit the spread of invasive species and will identify areas of invasive species along the trail. If any endangered plants are located in the project area, they will be identified and mapped.

21. Work with local businesses to develop a informational maps and obtain contributions and support.

RESPONSE:

We will continue to work with (FORT) to develop support and contributions for amenities, the creation of maps and associated literature, and the installation of informational kiosks to promote awareness to points of interest.

22. I am very pleased and excited by the progress taken to create a rail trail in Albany County! It will be a real boon to our county and to linking the suburbs and rural areas of Albany County with downtown Albany and with future bicycle trails along the Hudson River. Well done!

I would like to make one further suggestion, and would be willing to work locally at the grass roots level to see if we can attract interest – Why not link the future trail to Tawasentha Park and to Guilderland Town Hall? Guilderland is one of the fastest growing suburbs of Albany, and the link could be fairly easy. Simply link Guilderland

Town Hall at Western Ave (Rt. 20) to French's Mill Rd, and cross the pedestrian and bicycle bridge to the south and continue on along French's Hollow Rd to Rt. 146. That brings the cyclist or pedestrian near Tawasentha Park. A quick jog on 146 to Ostrander Rd, leads to a 2 mile rolling ride to the junction of County Rd 201, which then leads to the terminus of the proposed Rail Trail.

I think this would be a wonderful asset to the entire county, and strongly urge your and your staff's support of such an extension!

RESPONSE:

Providing a connection to Tawasentha Park is a good idea, however, this is beyond the scope of this project. This connection will be considered in the future. See our answer to question no. 2.

23. Possibly rebuild some of the railroad tracks east of the crossing in the Village of Voorheesville, purchase a caboose and a few box cars, and build a rail museum in Voorheesville.

RESPONSE:

This is another good idea; unfortunately it is beyond the scope and funding available for this project. See our answer to question no. 2. We recommend working with elected officials, historical societies, and rail fan associations to obtain support for this idea.

24. Thank you for the public meeting tonight to explain the plans for the county's rail trail. This is a tremendous project. Thank you and thank the members of the County Legislature for supporting the project. I hope that you and other members of the project will have a chance to take a "field trip" to visit the Ashwilticook Rail Trail (Adams MA to Pittsfield MA), as I suggested tonight. Among other reasons, the design of that path, both from a safety point of view, as well as "amenities" (benches, information signs, etc.) would be worth looking at before you finalize the design for the Albany County Rail Trail. Again, thank you for conducting a fair and open meeting and for your willingness to listen to suggestions.

RESPONSE:

We will look at the Ashwilticook Rail Trail in regards to safety and amenities.

25. As an avid bicycle rider for over thirty years in both Albany and Warren Counties, I am pleased to see that a linear park is planned from Albany to Voorheesville. That link will provide a valuable transportation and recreation resource addition to the existing Mohawk-Hudson trails.

If you have not already contacted the Rails-to-Trails Conservancy <http://www.railstotrails.org/index.html> for advice and guidance, I suggest it be done. That organization can provide valuable information for the conversion and development process.

Some specific thoughts:

1. Plan the project to provide a future signed link between South Pearl and the Hudson Preserve bike trails. The on-street bike trail connector will enhance the transportation component of the proposed trail.

2. Plan to provide a connection to the trail from the right rear corner of Delaware Plaza, if property rights can be negotiated.
3. The path's surface could be of a number of materials. Black-top is the most beneficial for all users, but stone dust may be more economical. However, I suggest that in areas where the trail will be hilly, such as on the eastern end of the trail leading into Albany, that black-top be used. That material will make the trail safer to use and be less likely to wash-out with heavy rain or spring thaws than stone dust.

Thank you for considering these comments. I look forward to a successful project completion and ribbon cutting.

RESPONSE:

1. *Providing a future signed connection between South Pearl Street and the Hudson Preserve bike trails is currently being investigated.*
2. *This work is outside the scope of this project. See our answer to question no. 2. In the future, if funding became available to provide a connection to the corner of Delaware Plaza, permission from the City of Albany would be required in order to place the trail over their existing water main.*
3. *The Rail Trail surface will consist of asphalt pavement. Asphalt is a durable material that can sustain many years of use and prevent washouts from occurring thus providing a safe surface for users to enjoy.*

26. In calling you today to introduce myself, I hope that the County will use me as a resource to support development of the rail trail project. As I mentioned, we have a 1943 survey from our property showing a slight crossover to the rail bed at the NE tip of our property. In addition, the original owners of our home had strong ties to the D&H.

I would like to be involved in the rail trail project in two ways, to:

a) Participate in design and planning activity involving the prospective public access (turnaround) property directly across the street from our home, to the extent that design work could include "green" plantings, crushed stone vs. asphalt, and native perennials. There are several local organizations that might be able to donate time and materials to this effort who I could contact - I've also been in contact with the Mohawk Hudson Land Conservancy and will be talking with their volunteer committee further about their efforts; and,

b) Promote historical highlights of the rail trail, including community education about forms of recreational travel from when the D&H was operating as a rail service for not only commuters who lived on the outskirts of Albany, but for Albanians to venture to the "country" i.e., current hamlets at the west end of the rail line. There's a direct link between the original owner of our home w/ the rail & the 1876 US Centennial. I'd think that historic education involving forms of recreational travel would be of interest to recreational users of the trail upon its completion.

I would like to participate in ways that are helpful to the County, either through grant development, fundraising or exploring in-kind services and, in ways that are meaningful for us as well intentioned community supporters and neighbors of the rail trail.

RESPONSE:

See our answer to question no. 17. The County will work with volunteers to enhance and promote the Rail Trail.

27. I strongly support the Rail Trail. My property abuts the rail line and I respectfully request that a serious effort be made to keep motorized vehicles off the trail in the interim until the trail is built, with sufficient barriers. If property owners want fencing let them put it in at their own expense.

RESPONSE:

Once the County actually owns the trail property (probably late Fall), we will consider installing barriers and posting signs to discourage motorized vehicle use in the interim basis. Construction of the Rail Trail will include permanent features to discourage/prevent motorized vehicle access. These features could possibly include access gates and bollards to limit the width available for users entering the trail as well as signs at each intersection indicating the motorized vehicles are not allowed. We also will request that local law enforcement agencies regularly patrol the trail.

28. (Trail) should be paved for transportation/commuting so that road bikes can be used (instead of mountain bikes) to cut down on travel time. Motorized vehicles must be prohibited 365 days per year.

RESPONSE:

See our answer to question no. 25 (part 3.) and the answer to question no. 27.

29. In concern to purchase land and use of this land. Just by looking at the future walking trail you can tell that many all terrain vehicles have explored the land. It seems that there are many people in the Voorheesville area with these machines and there are no legal trails around. Why not make a designated trail for these riders? If not this trail another designated area. These trails could have posted speed limits to insure safety.

RESPONSE:

Creating an adjacent trail for all-terrain vehicles is beyond the scope of this project. See our answer to question no. 2.

30. What will happen to those who bought next to the rail road for privacy and now will have people passing by their houses and peering in the windows and yards? Plus the standing water created by the removal of the rail bed (mosquitoes, West Niles). Property assessment reduction?

RESPONSE:

Statistics show that security is not typically an issue and property values actually increase not decrease as a result of the development of an adjacent multi use path. We are currently working with Friends of the Rail Trail (FORT) to encourage awareness and safety among community members. FORT will work with local residents to address any concerns over safety and security.

Stormwater management will be included in the design of this project.

31. A property owner at the Open House indicated that she would like the County to install fencing or landscaping between the property and the trail. Property owner indicated that they could not afford a fence.

RESPONSE:

The County cannot justify spending public funds for this purpose. The County is aware of the property owners concerns and as the design of the trail progresses they will meet with the concerned individual(s) to explain where the Rail Trail path will be and where the right-of-way line is located in relation to their property.

32. This (project) is great. I live in Slingerlands and am on the Board of the New York Bicycling Coalition. If you ever need help from us let me know!

NO RESPONSE REQUIRED

33. Is an environmental impact statement going to be performed? This unique green island connects many habitats along the way.

RESPONSE:

As with every project performed by the County, and in accordance with local, state and federal agencies, we conduct an environmental review to determine the impact of our project on the surrounding environment. This includes the impacts on threatened and endangered species, wetlands, historic resources, and adjacent residents. This review includes field studies, researching existing data bases, requests to state and federal environmental agencies for information regarding threatened and endangered species, and requests for the required environmental permits.

As a result of this review we have determined that the environmental impact of the Albany County Rail Trail is minimal and that a full Environmental Impact Statement is not necessary.

34. Can the Rail Trail be opened sooner than anticipated or be opened in segments as sections of the trail are completed?

RESPONSE:

We prefer not to open the trail until it is entirely constructed to meet current design and safety standards. Encouraging citizens to use a trail that does not meet these standards will not be safe.

35. Can a connection be made from the Albany County Rail Trail to the Mohawk Hudson Bike Path?

RESPONSE:

This connection is outside the scope/funding for this project. However, we are working jointly with the City of Albany to provide a safe connection.

