

Bicyclists = wallets on wheels

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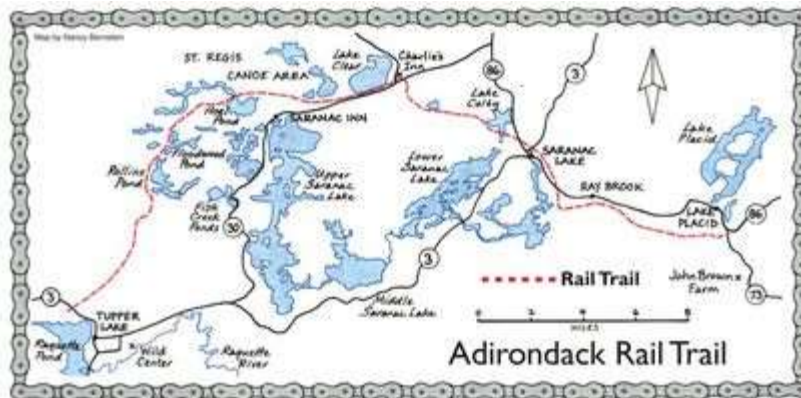
By MAUREEN PEROZA , Adirondack Recreational Trail Advocates

I have yet to hear an argument that gives me any hope that many people will actually travel to Tupper Lake from Utica on the proposed extension of the tourist train from the south. This very long and slow-moving ride would be one that might be done once but rarely repeated, especially with children or travelers looking for active recreation.

On the other hand, I have become convinced, due to personal experience and research, that it is very likely the proposed recreation trail connecting Tupper Lake, Saranac Lake and Lake Placid will attract a flood of bicycle-riding tourists to this area.

Once the 34-mile "rail trail" is established on the Tri-Lakes section of the old railroad corridor, bicycling should become a major tourist activity in the northern Adirondacks. It should, judging by experience elsewhere, take its place with hiking, boating and fishing as a major tourist draw.

Article Photos



The rail-to-trail movement - i.e., the conversion of abandoned or little-used rail lines into popular recreation trails-is now providing economic benefits to small towns all over the country. When there's a safe place to do it, bicycling, for a growing number of people, is the preferred way to enjoy sightseeing and partake of regular exercise. The overwhelming popularity of the new recreational trail in Tupper Lake gives just a tiny hint of future success of the proposed rail trail between Tupper Lake and Lake Placid.

In my last letter to the editor, I referred to Lake Tahoe in California and Nevada, which offers interesting comparisons to the Adirondack Park. It was projected by the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency (comparable to our Adirondack Park Agency) that cyclists will generate from \$6 million to \$23 million annually to Lake Tahoe communities. This information joins the multitude of positive projections for the economic success that biking could bring to our area.

Now comes a revealing report from the Seattle Times under the headline "A boom in bicycle tourism." It begins as follows: "Cities and states have long urged their residents to ride bicycles, as a healthy form of recreation and as a green alternative to driving. Now they are recognizing pedal power's economic potential."

The article notes that tourism officials and cycling advocates are referring to tourists on bicycles as "wallets on wheels." That's because they stay longer and spend more per day than most other tourists do. "Oregon," the article asserts, "has found that bicycle tourism contributes \$400 million a year to its economy." And Gov. John Hickenlooper of Colorado wants to make Colorado "the best state for biking in the country."

"I think being the best biking state is going to fuel economic growth and tourism," the governor is quoted as saying. "It's going to lead us toward a cleaner environment, and it's going to help us be the healthiest state in America."

Also at the forefront of this national trend is Florida, which is funding an initiative to connect bicycle paths around the state into a statewide network.

California, Nevada, Oregon, Florida, Washington and Colorado have nothing on the Adirondack Park when it comes to scenic landscapes and rural roads ideal for bicycling. All that's needed now is to convert our Tri-Lakes rail corridor into a world-class bikeway that will attract outdoor enthusiasts from all over, "wheeling their wallets" right into the communities along the way.

The Adirondack Park Agency is expected to give the final nod next month to converting the Tri-Lakes rail corridor into a year-round, multi-use recreation path. Let's hope the APA does so without further debate and delay. We should not have to wait any longer to make the Adirondack Park a mecca for bicycling in the eastern United States.

Maureen Peroza is a resident of Tupper Lake and a board member of Adirondack Recreational